

Kyodan

Kyodan News Letter

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN JAPAN

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THE MODERATOR SPEAKS

OKINAWA

Okinawa is a miniature of the problems of Japan and Asia and up to this point we, the Japanese people have not taken responsibility for these problems.

Japan was fortunate that after World War II our country was not divided as was Germany, so in a sense we were really not as aware of some problems as we should have been. Okinawa lies on the 27th parallel which is the Center line of the 38th parallel of Korea and the 17th parallel of Vietnam.

Many people doubted that Okinawa was a part of Japan and this is a sore spot in our own history. Geographically it lies a little nearer to China than it does to Japan but the Japanese spoken in Okinawa is a pure Japanese. During the Tokugawa Era in the 17th Century the Satsuma Clan of Kyushu recognized Okinawa as a part of its territory, one of the reasons being that they wanted to use Okinawa in its trade with China. Due to the isolation policy of the then, government, it was difficult for the Satsuma Clan to trade directly with China so they used Okinawa as their outpost. They ordered that when Chinese traders came to Okinawa that in around the port area, that no Japanese language, customs or clothing be used. Thus to give the appearance to the Chinese that they were dealing with Okinawans and not Japanese. For this, and other reasons people assumed that Okinawa was Chinese rather than Japanese.

After the Meiji Era the Japanese government built a normal school and up to a Senior High School system on Okinawa. The Senior government officials were all sent from the mainland of Japan. From the Tokugawa Era to the end of the Meiji Era heavier taxes were levied on Okinawans than upon the people living in Japan proper. Thus many people felt that the Okinawans were Japanese living on isolated islands who were victims of a Japan 'colonial policy'.

During the war these people were caught in the scissors of the Japan and American Armies and the end of the War brought American occupation. The Okinawans say that the occupation is a 'legal mountain' it is the victor occupying part of the land of the vanquished, Okinawa has become an unsinkable ship of the U.S.A.

In Japan there are still many American military bases which occupy only 0.33% of the total land area. In Okinawa the picture is entirely different, land occupied by military bases totals 14% of the total land area and 45% of this is arable land. Having a population of 391 persons to the square kilometer this is the highest population density in the world. Luxury items are fairly inexpensive due to a lack of import taxes but because the essentials for daily living must also be imported the cost of living is relative high.

Incomes are generally lower than in Japan. For instance, salaries of school teachers are about 90% of like teachers in Japan while fringe benefits and bonuses total only 45% of the Japan counterparts.

Amid these burdens the most representative voice and action of freedom is that of school teachers. The Ryukyu Legislature to resolve the problem has offered to raise salaries to the Japanese level but at the same time they want to prohibit teacher participation in political activities.

The livelihood of the Okinawan people depends upon the occupation and employment on related bases. However, here is a vicious economic circle--the Okinawan works and receives pay from U.S.A. sources and the places where the bulk of his income is spent is in businesses run by American interests. Most Okinawans want to return to Japan but psychologically they are in deep despair.

The Okinawa Kyodan and the Japan Kyodan were members of the same church group at the end of the war. Our coming together is a natural result of our past history and relationships. As we clasp our hands together we need to aid the entire mother land of Japan. We need to help all of Asia, we need to help heal the scars of our divided world.

This is a duty of the Kyodan because of our unwillingness to accept responsibility; this is our cause as we confess our sins committed against these, our people, the people of Okinawa.

THE DEATH OF PASTOR AKAIWA.

A graduate of the old Tokyo Theological Seminary, founder and pastor of Uehara Church for 35 years, Pastor Akaiwa died Nov. 28, 1966, at the age of sixty-three years.

During his ministry he was very responsive to the many problems that arose in society, in Japan. This type of ministry is rare. Just before his death he greatly stimulated thoughts in church renewal through his articles in his monthly magazine--The Finger.

Before the war Pastor Akaiwa devoted himself to a study of the theology of T. Takakura and K. Barth, he established a well disciplined church and nurtured members of a very staunch faith.

After the war he felt that the church should concern itself with the social and political problems, one of his conclusions was that a person could be a Christian and a Communist. Out of this concept arose many problems both at home and abroad. However, the raising of these problems helped to bring the church out of its lethargy and caused it to assume responsibility for problems within the church. Later he sympathized with Bultmann's demythologizing of the Scriptures and concentrated his study on the Historical Jesus, criticizing the formal traditions of the church and argued against an ideological God. He authored more than ten books the latest being "Exodus From Christianity". The content of this work was regarded as a departure from the Kyodan Confession of Faith and he was advised to voluntarily withdraw from the Kyodan. However, before this came to fruition he passed away.

No. 12--February 20, 1967

page 3

THE DEATH OF PASTOR AKAIWA (continued from page 2)

He was a very sensitive person to social and political problems and so sometimes to answer these challenges he stepped out of the context of the church. However, he committed himself to a study of how to receive the Bible as the living Word and how to live this kind of experience.

The problems he raised are problems that must be faced by the Church in Japan and all the world.

OKINAWA-JAPAN CONSULTATION

The Okinawa Kyodan and Japan Kyodan Union discussions will be on the agenda of the Japan Kyodan at its Executive Committee meeting Feb. 20-22; while the Okinawa Annual Assembly on Feb. 25th will discuss this matter. Out of these two meetings should come proposals for further steps.

JAPAN ELECTION RESULTS

The National Elections just completed in Japan brought no great change in the composition of the Diet as far as the political parties were concerned. Except that from Sokka gakkai, the Japan based religious party, 25 members were elected. This is a first time venture for them in the upper house and it was considered a real victory. Out of the 23 Christians seeking election to the Diet 17 were elected. 8 of these are members of the Liberal-Democratic party, the other 9 belonging to the Japanese Socialist Party. The denominations of these people are as follows; Presbyterian 2, Episcopal 3, Lutheran 1, Independent 2, Catholic 2, and Kyodan members elected were 7 persons.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Japan Bible Society usually ranks just beneath USA and Britain in number of sales. This with only 1% of the population Christian.

One fourth of the Christian Churches are in Tokyo where a tenth of the people live.

The oldest Kyodan related Church is the Shinsakae Church, Tokyo, founded in January 1873 by the Presbyterian Church of the USA.

The present Kyodan Moderator, Vice Moderator, and Secretary are the youngest ever elected.

14 young Japanese are serving as missionaries of the United Church of Christ of Japan, in South America, North America, Egypt, Thailand, India and Okinawa.

